

Dance Up Close

While spring serves as a welcoming prelude to summer, it is also ripe with wonderful symbolism: rebirth, fertility and growth. Thus Festival Ballet Providence is opening the spring portion of their season with the popular Up Close On Hope dance series.

This latest installment consists of 10 pieces, six world premieres, and features many of the company's new and younger dancers, showcasing the company's continuing growth. The program opens with the premiere of guest choreographer Thomas Vacanti's *Enroulement*, a simple, yet beautifully danced number. Four dancers, through a series of pas de trois and solos, nicely capture the musicality of the choreography. Next, company trainee Louisa Chapman kicks up her pointe shoes in a fun and playful romp, *The First Thirty Years* (world premiere). Set to the twanging guitar of Eric Clapton's *Mean Old World*, Chapman is wonderful while teasingly gesturing for one to come hither only to quickly turn away, at one point lifting her long white gown and flipping up her backside to her overmatched suitor.

While much of UCOH's popularity revolves groundbreaking premieres, the classical pieces also seem to receive the most robust applause, with the response following *Flames of Paris* being no exception. Here, trainee Eugenia Zinovieva shines, making a challenging pas de deux filled with many supported and unsupported pirouettes look easy. Her partner, the always exciting Toleu Mukanov, doesn't disappoint either. Always pushing the limits, his gravity defying leaps leave audience members on the edge of their seats until he calmly lands. *Rhapsody for Two* (world premiere) set to the music of George Gershwin, is both sultry and temperamental and seems perfectly suited for Emily Loscocco and Ilya Burov. Emily radiates a natural seductiveness that works well with his unassuming confidence and ease. The two have partnered before in similar numbers and seem to get better and better together. Just before intermission, company member Vilia Putrius presents her world premiere, *Musica*. With the ever expressive Jennifer Ricci and two male dancers, this piece comes across as very contemplative with each dancer yearning for something. Two come together while another fades into the background; they switch, sending the other off to be alone. Though the truncated movements are sometimes a bit odd, there is some interesting partnering, with Ricci literally climbing up or walking over another dancer.

The second half opens with *Pieta* (world premiere). *Pieta* is actually a famous sculpture by Michelangelo depicting Mary holding Jesus after the Crucifixion. Set to a soaring operatic musical score by Handel, this piece projects a certain religious theme, but it comes across as multilayered and unclear. In the end, the lights fade on a single dancer with arms outstretched and palms turned upward.

Grand Pas Classique once again highlights the mastery of Vilia Putrius and Mindaugus Bauzys. Putrius beautifully smiles while making the difficult look easy, hopping for 32 counts on one pointe shoe while slowly extending the opposite leg. Bauzy completes a series - a perfectly executed double tour en l'airs or circling the studio in grand jete with his front leg perfectly extended. Over the years, FBP audiences have become spoiled by their near perfection.

Company member Alex Lantz marks his choreographic debut with *Sides of Farewell*, a very whimsical and simple piece that, much like *Enroulement*, is beautifully danced. Company apprentice Tegan Rich looks especially impressive here, telling a compelling story through her facial expressions. Rich truly stands out in former FBP company member Mark Harootian's *Identity*. Set to the music of heavy metal band Tool, reorchestrated for the piano, this piece has a futuristic feel. Dancers seem to pulsate, then

one arm hits another and then another, setting off a series of movements. While some of the partnering appears cumbersome, Rich's solo variation filled with dizzying pirouettes impresses. FBP Artistic Director Mihailo Dhjuric's *The Unexpected* completes the bill, a romantic and playful pas de deux danced nicely by Ruth Whitney and Alan Alberto. Dance into spring; visit www.festivalballet.com for details on upcoming shows.